



Summer Host Family Handbook

Welcoming an international student into your home – an unforgettable experience!

Becoming a host family to a student from a different country and culture is both an enriching and a challenging experience. Welcoming an international student into your home can lead to friendships that will last a lifetime. By sharing your home and offering guidance to your student, your family becomes an important part of that student's life.

Your student is coming to you as part of a summer camp program sponsored by SPIRAL International, located in Burlington, Vermont. We are an educational organization which promotes learning, intercultural relationships, and understanding.

Becoming a host family

Families interested in summer hosting should contact the camp's site coordinator. The site coordinator will follow up with you to give you an opportunity to ask questions and gather more information on the program. In addition, you will be asked to fill out an application form including two references, and to receive a home visit from the site coordinator before being approved to host.

Host families agree to:

- Explain family rules and expectations;
- Provide adequate bedroom space;
- Accompany their student to local cultural events;
- Invite and encourage participation in family weekend events and travel;
- Encourage involvement in daily functions of family life (meal preparation, clean up, etc.).

Host families are NOT responsible for:

- Monitoring the student's spending;
 - Putting the student on any kind of diet, including one for personal or religious beliefs.
- Families are, however, responsible for providing healthy meals and snacks.

Key points for a successful hosting experience

- ✓ Welcome the student into your home with care and understanding. Remember that the student may be homesick and/or jet lagged upon arrival.
- ✓ Think of the student as a member of the family, and include them in normal family activities.
- ✓ Talk to your student, even if he or she doesn't understand everything you say.
- ✓ Maintain communication with SPIRAL staff; they can help with cultural or language difficulties.
- ✓ Successful families give their students time, attention, support, and love. These attributes make the program a memorable experience for everyone involved.

SPECIFICS

Student arrival

Once students arrive at their host family, excitement is high. During the first hours, students may not be the least bit tired and usually want to take in as much as they possibly can. However, some students will be tired or jet-lagged after the long journey. Some will be very hungry, and others will not be hungry or want to eat for a day or two. Remember, the combination of excitement and being in another time zone can produce different behavior. Some students adjust quickly while others take longer.

After arriving home, show the student his/her room and around the house. Explain where things are and how they work. Remember, the more help students get with practical matters, the more at ease they will feel. Don't be afraid to explain even simple things, since you don't always know what the student will be familiar with. For example, it is important to show students that the shower curtain has to go inside the tub, because Chinese showers usually empty into a drain on the floor. Furthermore, keep in mind that most Chinese students don't have animals in their homes, so they may not be very comfortable with your pets at first. Be clear and direct with the student and approach questions and concerns with an open mind. Hesitation and confusion often occur for both family and student. Remember to be patient!

Those first few days

There will probably be cultural differences which appear right away. Here are some topics for you and your family to keep in mind:

1. Food – in some cases when students first arrive they do not eat a lot. Imagine how it would feel to stay with a family from a different culture, and having to eat unfamiliar foods at every meal! A good idea is to take them to the grocery store where they can point out some of their favorite foods.
2. Manners – what we perceive as good manners can be completely different in another country. Silence and lack of curiosity in some areas of the world is considered rude. However, in other cultures, it is a sign of respect. In some cultures, people do not say please and thank you as

readily as we do in America. Table manners are different, and a student's level of modesty can be quite different from your own.

3. Cultural Sensitivity – students come from many different walks of life. Customs about cleanliness, including showers and laundry, to personal space, including shaking hands and hugging may vary greatly from ours. We encourage host families to be open about these and other habits with their students.
4. Language – students might find it difficult to talk with and understand their new families. It helps if the family tries to speak slowly and try to avoid using slang. Don't hesitate to gently correct the student's pronunciation or grammar.

Student travel

Host families are encouraged to take their students to visit other places in the area. However, we ask that you inform the site coordinator before taking your student on a trip that is going to last more than a day. In case of an emergency, SPIRAL needs to know where to reach the student or family.

Auto and Liability Insurance

Most homeowners have personal liability coverage through their homeowners insurance, and their automobile insurance covers anyone riding in the car. Nevertheless, we recommend that you check with your insurance agent for coverage details.

Medical insurance

All Chinese students who attend SPIRAL summer camps have medical insurance. The Chinese teachers who come with the group will carry insurance policies with students' names and will be able to contact the insurance representative. If the student needs to see a doctor, arrange to bring along the site coordinator and one of the teachers to translate if necessary. Host families are **NOT** responsible for paying for medical services.

Support for the host family

If you have any sort of questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact the site coordinator or another camp staff member. They have experience dealing with international students, and will be happy to assist.

Your willingness to host is vitally important and very much appreciated, both by the international students and by SPIRAL. We could not continue to run our programs without the participation and generous hospitality of the families who host our students. Thank you!